

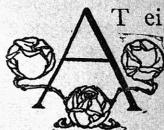
# AN ARISTOCRAT.\*

BY ELEANOR M. INGRAM.

A SERIAL STORY.

## CHAPTER V.

A DUEL, AND AFTER.



At eight of that same morning, when he had met Château-Leclair, Jean presented himself at the king's levee, debonair and smiling as usual.

Once Louis's levee had meant a crowded room, a reception for the honor of attending which men fought. Now, the revolution was too near, too menacing for flattery. The king saw his young courtier at once, and summoned him with a nod.

"I am glad you suffer no depression from your lansquenet," he remarked idly.

"Sire, I have found the morning diverting."

"Already?"

"I rose at four, sire."

"What to do, pray?"

Jean pensively regarded the Comte d'Artois, who had moved a short distance away and now shot him a glance of mingled warning and amusement.

"Sire, I have been disobeying you, and fighting Château-Leclair. You will grant that it was a necessity."

Louis gave an exclamation, his brows meeting.

"You have killed him?"

"No, sire; he will get well."

"Your brother—"

"Suspects nothing, sire. I left him asleep."

Louis stared at him for a moment, then looked down at the glittering knick-knacks of the dressing-table.

"I have seen you fence," he said curtly, "and I know Château-Leclair. Why is he alive? You meant to kill him last night?"

"Yes, I meant to kill him," Jean admitted frankly. "I even believed I would enjoy it, sire. But, somehow, when I had him there helpless," he paused thoughtfully, then looked at the king with the old flashing laughter of eyes and lips, "somehow, it did not seem worth while."

"There is all a philosophy in that," commented Louis, and fell silent.

Jean waited with his unruffled pleasantness, as if it were quite customary to make such confessions of disobedience to a self-willed sovereign, disarmingly unconscious of the consequences usually entailed.

If he had been concerned with the fourteenth Louis instead of the sixteenth, the experiment might have proved dangerous. But when the king looked up again, his unlovely face was more than ordinarily kind.

"Your self-control last night must be made to account for this morning's lack of it, I suppose," he said dryly. "Take your pardon, Gérin; we will blame the lansquenet."

"Thank you, sire," Jean replied with an equable dignity worthy of the graver Esmé, and stooped to the offered hand.

The palace life was launched on its daily current when he strolled down the stairs an hour later. It would be necessary to tell Esmé next, he reflected, nodding abstracted salutations to one or another of those he passed; Esmé the conservative, who had a certain supercilious contempt for anything so crude as a duel. Esmé was a last refinement of the *grand seigneur*, a type at once out of date and over-modern.

The voice which recalled his straying attention to the fact that he was still in

\* This story began in THE CAVALIER for November, 1908.

the palace was that of Marie Antoinette herself. With the Dauphin at her side, and attended only by Mlle. Gabrielle du Marais, she had come across the hall.

"M. de Gérin," she was saying, her large, melancholy eyes dwelling on him attentively, "France is reaching a day when we may repeat with truth that the favor of princes is vanity. But our admiration and friendship may be of value for a little while; and they are wholly yours."

"Madame—" stammered the bewildered Jean.

She held out her hand.

"You and your brother have been in the king's circle rather than mine; pray remember us more frequently."

Involuntarily Jean looked his hopeless incomprehension into the eyes of Mlle. du Marais, and she lingered an instant as the queen passed on.

"Madame the queen may speak, *monsieur*," she said in her slow, *trainante* voice subdued to a mere breath of sound, "but we who keep silence may feel also." She curtsied deeply to him, and hastened after her mistress.

He was hesitating between pursuit or resignation to his perplexity, when an eager clasp fell on his arm.

"Gérin, I have been seeking you for an hour! To think that you left me in ignorance, *mon cher*, to learn this romance outside. In this age it is all astonishing, this that you come from doing. Consider that you and the marquis have returned to the days of gold."

Jean turned to confront his second in the recent duel.

"Decidedly all the world is amiably mad," he responded impatiently. "One would imagine I had rendered all Paris a service by sheathing a rapier in our dear Château-Leclair. What have Esmé and I done, D'Allard?"

The little *vicomte* bowed, hand on heart.

"Do you ask me that, *monsieur le marquis?*"

Jean uttered an exclamation, his color dying out.

"The king told you?" he began.

"Not at all; I had it from Campan, who had it from Mme. de Lamballe, who had it from Château-Leclair himself last evening."

"And I might have killed him," said Jean deliberately.

"But you are famous," protested D'Allard excitedly. "Ah, how many of us would give an ancestor to attain an hour's notice! You will see, you and your brother will be on every tongue—the women will regard you with passion, with sentiment. We adore virtue, we French—in others. It costs so little to admire, and one is elevated by example. You will ride with me this afternoon, yes?"

Jean put him carefully aside without replying, and went down into the street. Others called to him as he passed, one of the queen's ladies waved a playful signal to approach, but he neither heard nor saw.

Esmé was in his room, his back to the door as he pored over some letters. He had no need to ask whose step had sprung up the stairs.

"News from Vallon, *très cher*," he announced, tranquilly pleased. "Pierre says all goes well; the harvests were large this year, and winter brings no hardships. A steward of price, is Pierre. Do you know, I am almost longing for Vallon to-day."

Jean crossed the room and flung himself on his knee by the other's side, resting an arm on the broad arm of the chair.

"And I, and I! Esmé, I wish you had kept me at the forge. I wish I had died years ago and Aude had made you forget to grieve."

Pierre's letter slipped to the floor as Esmé caught his brother to him, and from the packet that accompanied it sifted all the sweet country freight—chosen grains of wheat and corn, perfumed raisins dark with their rich sap, and a whole butterfly group of those rose and violet petals from which old Nanette distilled Elysian odors, to imprison them, genius-like, in her jars.

"Jean, what is it? What has happened since last night? Where have you been without me since four o'clock? Château-Leclair—"

"I have bungled even in that; he will live. But I did not know then. Esmé, what if our story is all over Paris; if they make an hour's outcry of the thing we scarcely put into words to each other? How can you bear to hear their toy praise, their chattering sentimentalism?"

"You have fought with Château-Leclair?"

"Yes; what does that matter? Answer the rest. Château-Leclair spread his tale last night."

Esmé winced; but Jean's hidden eyes could not see the self-betrayal, and the steady voice told nothing.

"*Très cher*, what is there to answer. This tangle is no fault of ours. And, surely, it is not so difficult for me to acknowledge that I owe my title to your generosity; it is you who—" He did not complete the sentence; there was no need.

"To have them touch it!"

"I know, I know. Still, I think we can shut them out; after all, Jean, few people ever pass the antechamber of one's consciousness."

There was a silence. The morning sun, finding the window opposite, settled warmly in a pool of amber light around the scattered tribute of Vallon.

"I cannot understand Château-Leclair's defiance of the king's order," Esmé said thoughtfully.

Jean laughed shortly and raised his head.

"Ah, *ça*, and mine? The king approved of my morning's amusement, perhaps? But he said nothing, not a word; only asked why I had not killed Château-Leclair. That is a question I have been asking myself ever since. The king is gentle."

"Château-Leclair is not you. I fancy that if he gets well he will pay."

"Oh, he will get well. As for paying—"

"Yes?"

Jean rose abruptly and walked to the window, where he presently turned again.

"This morning as I rode out before dawn, I came to a group of wretched women who were gathered around a little child. I— Esmé, there never was a thing so pitiful; they said it had starved. Carelessly enough, I answered something of France being able to grow bread for all, and the woman who was taking my gold flashed out that there was bread at the palace. These conditions will not last; I should like to be certain that by the time Château-Leclair recovers, the king will be able to exact payment."

"Vallon will yield to none of this mad-

ness," Esmé said after a moment. "I wish *mademoiselle* could make her decision, Jean—could give one of us the right to place her there in safety when the danger comes."

How near that wish was of accomplishment they had no way of divining, or perhaps even the self-contained Esmé would not have spoken so calmly. Indeed, a student of feminine moods might have foreseen that this affair would precipitate a choice, without at all being able to judge for whom the choice would be.

Meanwhile, what Jean had learned to expect from his morning at the palace, what the little *Vicomte d'Allard* had enthusiastically predicted, was coming to pass with overwhelming fulness. Before night, Paris—the Paris of the court—had fallen into an excitement of sentimentalism. The story of the *De Gérins* was the theme of every salon, gathering romantic additions as it ran.

The next few days were a grotesque martyrdom. The one subject of comment was embellished with open compliments, and deliciously obvious comparisons, commencing with Damon and Pythias and including Roland and Oliver. Jean's duel added dramatic interest; the marked favor of the king and queen gave the final *cachet*.

It is safe to say that but for Aude the two brothers would have retreated to Vallon.

"When I reflect that I might have killed Château-Leclair," Jean repeated between laughter and rage, in their intervals of blessed solitude.

His desire would have been to remain in seclusion until the agitation passed. This suggestion Esmé firmly vetoed, permitting no change in their way of life; he knew they had only to wait until a new sensation stepped before the present one.

The first time either saw Aude alone was a week after the king's party at *lansquenet*. A few light words in a salon, on the way to drive or promenade—they had exchanged no more.

It was Jean, quite accidentally, who had this first interview.

There was, and perhaps is, one house in Paris as purely exotic as the Italian gardens of Marly. It was not new in 1789, when Jean climbed its steps in

search of Esmé, but stood a pathetic record of the Andalusian exile who had built it in loving imitation of his own lost home. To the outsider it presented a coldly impersonal façade of dull gray stone; within—

The *patio* that Jean entered, the heart and center of the building, was jeweled with vivid flowers and ringed with light Moorish arches over which writhed curious snake-like vines with spotted blossoms of deep purple. In the middle a fountain tinkled perpetually; its pool lit by the glint of golden fins; around it were grouped vases holding the strange lizard-cactus of Andalusia.

And in the midst of this uncanny beauty sat fair French Aude, her wee spaniel nestling at her feet.

"*Mademoiselle!*" he exclaimed. "Now I know why my heart quickened as I crossed the threshold. *Ah, ça*, and I might have sought Esmé in a dozen other places! I will burn a wax-candle before the altar of Chance."

She laughed at the extravagance, but the hand she yielded to him trembled.

"Mme. de Quérouelle is my aunt, *monsieur*. I came to spend the morning with her. But you are destined to disappointment; *monsieur le marquis* is not here."

"*Mademoiselle*, have I the air of disappointment?"

The purple-blue eyes met his, and fell.

"One cannot tell, *monsieur*, because you laugh. All this week you have laughed, but I think you have not been happy."

Jean regarded her in touched surprise.

"It is good of you to notice that," he answered. "If it had been so, the gift of your sympathy would make the hurt well, *mademoiselle*."

Still she did not return to her chair, and he remained perforse standing before her, watching the quickened rise and fall of her breast, the soft curves of the round young cheek and slim throat.

"How should one not notice, not wonder?" she murmured. "So much courage, *monsieur*, so much love and trust—"

He colored with her, scarcely less troubled.

"No more than Esmé gave me," he responded.

"But he needs nothing. It is you who must give all, suffer all. It is you who

must bear to have them say—what they say. *Monsieur*, I—presently my aunt will come and we may not be able to speak again—I—oh, can you not understand?"

"Aude," he cried, "Aude, am I to understand *that*?"

Before his impetuous movement she drew back, scarlet from throat to temples.

"If you will," she faltered. "*Monsieur*, when all Paris cries out in admiration of you, how should I escape? I am not afraid of—anything. Once you said I was like that other Aude; I want to show you—"

He caught her hands to his lips, and his splendid radiance flashed up like a flame.

"Aude, heart's desire, I love you, I love you. Did I need to say it? Have I not said it each time I looked at you? Aude—"

There was the crash of a closing door, a rustle, and laughing voices in the hall. Aude snatched her hands from him and sank into a chair as Mme. de Quérouelle appeared at the door.

"M. de Gérin?" the old lady greeted him merrily. "The lateness of my toilet is a scandal, is it not? But, perhaps Aude has amused you better than I. I have here another visitor who arrived but this moment. Enter, *cher marquis*."

There was no interval for the recovery of emotions too recently freed. Jean, still flushed, still star-eyed as a girl, saw Esmé cross to Aude, saw her startled gaze rest on the serene face, then her glance of blended terror and bewilderment toward himself. So might have looked one awaking in some unfamiliar place, one suddenly coming from the glitter of the theater into a quiet, sunny street.

Jean flung back his head, then stooped to pass his fingers across the distorted cactus buds.

"Some day, *madame*, these little lizard-flowers will put down their paws and run away. Only see how they shiver," he remarked playfully, and turned to meet Esmé's affectionate smile with the bright warmth of his own.

When the call was over and the two were outside once more, Jean paused for a moment on the steps.

"Do you remember, my Esmé, that

spring morning long ago, when we tried to climb the old tower? How I reached the top and stood for an instant among the fluttering pigeons, all the country below a picture spread for my delight, then a stone slipped and the darkness beneath had swallowed me?"

Esmé laughed.

"Yes, and it might have proved the darkness indeed. You frightened me too thoroughly for forgetfulness. But why do you think of it?"

"I do not know. Only I have felt that sensation since, I think."

It was not easy to see Aude alone; this morning had been a mere gift of chance. But Jean was determined to speak with her before night, and he forced circumstances to obedience.

Although the meeting took place in the Princess de Lamballe's salon that evening, under the casual eyes of half the court, he did not alter his intention.

They danced together, Aude's eyes persistently veiled from him; afterward they sat down, and under cover of the general hum and movement he explained.

"*Mademoiselle*, this morning in your great goodness you were most kind to me; I cannot bear that your kindness should cause you pain to-night. I am not very wise, *mademoiselle*, but because I myself love so earnestly, I know that a woman does not meet the one cared for as to-night you met me. It grieves my heart to see you shrink from me, to feel your little hand flutter in mine. And this morning when Esmé entered, you regretted."

Her small head drooped lower, the rose tints had left the pearl. Jean gently took the fan from her relaxing fingers and himself moved the waving white plumes back and forth.

"You decided too soon, is it not so? No wonder, in all this artificial enthusiasm with which Paris chooses to bewilder itself, that you were for an instant bewildered also. Moreover, you pitied my hurt pride, in your gentleness which I hold ever in memory; and that pity dazzled you just for a moment, perhaps. You will tell me if I am wrong?"

"What can you think of me?" she murmured brokenly. "A coquette, one who cannot be steadfast an hour—"

He checked her at once.

"I think of you all good thoughts; there never can be one more honored. This morning, we will set it aside. Not that I give you up, *mademoiselle*—unless you bid me, and know now that it is Esmé—"

She shook her head mutely.

"Then we will go on just the same. I am so obstinate, *mademoiselle*." She felt without seeing his delightful smile.

"I must cling always to that hope and wait. And whether it is Esmé or I who win that dearest grace of all, we three shall be just a little better friends than any one else; is it not so?"

Aude looked up then and met the velvet-black eyes.

"You are so good!" she exclaimed passionately. "Let me try to tell you all I know myself. I did believe I knew this morning, until he came— *Monsieur*, it is this: when I am alone, when I consider calmly, it is your brother; when I see you, it is you. You said pity dazzled me—it is *you* who do that. And I cannot tell!"

Jean raised her fingers to his lips.

"Then we will wait, *mademoiselle*. We have patience, Esmé and I."

As he rose to leave her, Aude gave him a hurried glance of entreaty.

"*Monsieur*, the marquis—"

"*Mademoiselle*, Esmé would never forgive one who failed your confidence. Have I not asked that we go on just the same?"

There was nothing to indicate how dull a prison "just the same" seemed after a glimpse he had had beyond. But there was Esmé; he had always Esmé.

## CHAPTER VI.

### SHADOWS.

It had been December when Aude faced her two lovers in Mme. de Quérouelle's *patio*. The months which followed were the last of the France they knew; the months when the stately monarchy died and the scarlet revolution rose in its place; the months when Louis struggled hopelessly with Assembly and States-General, when he and the Queen made their desperate, unsuccessful attempt to escape from the kingdom no longer theirs.

There could be no question of the part taken by Esmé and Jean in this anarchy and confusion. Royalists by every tie of birth, tradition, and friendship, it was not for them to judge Louis's government in his hour of failure. Nor was it for them to return to Vallon, although they knew that placid village lay faithful and untroubled in its corner, waiting affectionately for the *seigneur*.

They were with Louis during the tragic return from Versailles, they shared those strange, fiery days and somber nights. They learned to regard quietly the loss of friends, the constant nearness of death. One of the first to reach the guillotine was the little Vicomte d'Allard; one of the first to desert to the revolutionists was Château-Leclair.

"And I might have killed him," mourned Jean regretfully, thereby bringing one of the king's almost forgotten smiles.

In early July Mme. de Beaumarchais gave way, daring no longer remain in the frenzied city. To England, where so many of her class had taken refuge, she decided to go with Aude.

On the day fixed for the departure Jean was unable to leave the king, so Esmé went alone for the farewell visit. In the old days Jean would have gone first and explained to Louis afterward, now he paid punctilious obedience to the least whim of the powerless king.

Very quiet and subdued was that last interview. Mme. de Beaumarchais was frankly nervous, Aude shrinking and childishly young in her simple dress, with her unpowdered golden hair coiled low.

Whether it was this appealing helplessness of the girl once so assured, or the sense of finality in their parting, the grave Esmé was swept into an impulsive act that Jean had never dared even in his one golden moment of the *patio*.

Mme. de Beaumarchais had left them at some household call, and as Aude lifted her iris eyes to the young noble at her side, he deliberately stooped and kissed her.

"Whether it is Jean's wife or mine who leaves me," he said, his low voice firm and very tender, "it is the one whom I love for all time. Some day you will tell me, Aude, if I live; if I die I think the good God will let me know. But

one of us will take you to Vallon, which I have so often pictured to you. And it is good-by only until then."

She found no words at all, nor even moved away from him, but her downcast lashes flashed suddenly bright with tears. *Madame's* step was at the door before Esmé could speak again.

And one anxiety slipped away with their going, leaving the next weeks easier for the two men who stayed. Knowing Aude safe, no other danger seemed important.

But at the end of August the inevitable came, with dizzying swiftness.

The queen, virtually a prisoner in the palace, was still permitted a daily promenade in her own garden. On this morning the little Dauphin had accompanied her, Esmé, Jean, and M. Campan attending them.

As usual, the sullen-eyed crowds pressed close on either side, watching—restrained only by respect for their own soldiers who lounged near. So far the watchers had been more than ordinarily silent—the walk frequently being a very martyrdom of insult—but as Marie Antoinette set her small foot on the terrace step, a man on the inner circle of the crowd leaned forward and repeated a single phrase from one of the unspeakable ballads concerning her.

The queen stopped short, the outraged crimson rushing over her face; but quicker than her movement was Esmé's as he leaned forward and struck the smile from the coarse lips with a blow that sent the man crashing down the long marble stairs.

A fierce howl of rage broke from the mob and mingled with the queen's cry.

"Campan, take *madame* in," rang Jean's clear voice above the tumult, and as the flood rolled up he reached Esmé's side. "Ah," he laughed breathlessly, "it is in my mind that you were a trifle crude, my Esmé—"

The reason that they did not both die then, beaten and trampled to death as many an aristocrat had been and was to be, was because the republican guards of Marie Antoinette rushed to their aid. The reason for this unaccustomed benevolence was even more simple; the envious Jean had spent many an idle hour amusing the sergeant's tiny, crippled boy.

But before the sunny noon had ended, the two brothers faced each other in an underground cell of the Conciergerie, prisoners awaiting a farcical trial.

Esmé had sunk down on a broken chair, utterly exhausted, his remorseful gray eyes on Jean. Standing opposite, his handsome young head slightly tilted back as he surveyed the room, Jean caught the glance and responded characteristically.

"But it is incredible good fortune, this! When I reflect that they might have parted us, Esmé."

"I have brought *you* here—"

"If I were not here, I would be in despair. Ah, what a charming cell for two!"

"Say at least that I was selfish, mad, to give way to passion there."

"Why should I say it? Only I have two regrets now—that I also was not permitted to reach that animal, and that I did not kill Château-Leclair. But your hand is cut—you suffer." He knocked briskly on the grated door. "Citizen, you down there—come here."

The jailer obeyed from sheer amazement.

"Bring us water, *mon ami*."

"Water!" gasped the man, staring at the animated face behind the grate.

"Certainly—water, much water. You do not use it down here, perhaps? And, listen; after the water you will take this list which I am about to give you to the house of M. de Gérin, where the servants will deliver to you the portmanteaus containing what we desire. When we receive them, I give you another note and at the house you will collect a good handful of louis d'or. That goes well, yes? Make haste, then."

The stupefied jailer opened his lips, and closed them again.

"An aristocrat," he began, with a feeble effort to recall an appropriate phrase.

"Assuredly I am an aristocrat, else why am I here? But the louis d'or are altogether republican. Make haste, *mon ami*. I have not so long a life in prospect that I wish to waste it in waiting."

The man's slow smile of appreciation answered the sparkling regard.

"Good," he responded, "Good, citizen; I go."

"*Très cher*," Esmé said in helpless amusement as Jean turned, "who but you—"

"I would have made an autocrat? Never mind, if I had been king I believe I could have laughed France into sanity. Come, help me make our list."

They sat down together on the one bench, Jean's tablet on his knee. After an instant Esmé put his arm around the other's shoulder.

They had been in prison an hour, and already the court seemed far away. Looking farther back, Vallon had the misty beauty of a place seen through long vistas of years.

The months ahead had also their vistas—a long pathway winding to a hidden end. But that morning they fancied their captivity would be brief, not knowing that even revolutionary justice has its delays.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE HOUR OF DECISION.

A LONG, low room, dimly lighted by cobweb-hung windows set at intervals where wall and ceiling met, a room earthen-floored, bare of furniture except for a few broken chairs and benches, heavy with the smell of mold and damp—yet which echoed with soft voices, the accents of faultless Parisian, the graceful allusions and compliment of the salon. Closing the eyes, one might have been at Versailles or the Petit Trianon; looking, the place was a prison in all its grimness.

At least fifty or sixty men and women were scattered about the room, chatting in groups, strolling up and down arm in arm, or watching the progress of an animated game of prison-bar. All were occupied, all composed or even nonchalant in bearing; in this alone might have been read their class.

"One handkerchief will unravel much thread," Gabrielle du Marais was saying to a duchess of the blood who shared her seat. "But the needle—there one is at a loss. At the last prison in which they placed me, was Bettine de la Tour—she was betrothed to that Russian prince, you remember—and she had a needle that we all used."

"One score for Pontalec," called a player eagerly. "We gain—we gain steadily!"

"Did you hear of the good fortune of that poor Suresne?" questioned a white-haired gentleman whose arm hung in a scarf. "His name was read from the list last night; this morning when the jailers went to him, they found he had died in his sleep."

"It appears to me, *monsieur le comte*, that after waiting so long, he might at least have the diversion of a public exit," lisped the one addressed, settling the torn lace of his ruffles.

"But the disgrace, the insult!"

"Bah, the excitement pays. Am I not right, *mademoiselle*?"

"I have not yet tried either way, *monsieur*," answered Gabrielle du Marais's soft, slow tones. "I can only assure you that I am very tired of remaining here."

"And we, *mademoiselle*, are content here forever if you but stay. Ask some one else, *cher comte*; ask—here comes Gérin, ask him."

There was a general movement of pleasure and welcome as the heavy grated door opened and reclosed with a dull crash. Smiling, all turned to salute the man on the threshold, and smilingly Jean responded.

"*Mesdames, messieurs*, I bring you news," he announced gaily. "Fancy—there will be no list to-morrow morning; only to-night's. Is it not a charming attention of *messieurs* our executioners? Those who escape this evening, will live—in all probability—twenty-four secure hours. It is dazzling!"

There was a great wave of laughter and relief.

"But how do you know, *monsieur*?" cried the duchess, holding her half-unraveled handkerchief across her knee.

Jean saluted her.

"*Madame*, I am at your feet; the jailer told me ten minutes ago."

"It is only to Gérin that jailers talk," commented the lisping De la Vigne.

"Pardon. He talks to every one, he talks to himself; only to me he talks differently."

"Come play, Gérin," urged the group at prison-bar.

"No, come rather here," called one from the opposite corner. "Look, Gérin,

we have a set of dice the guards overlooked in Du Chaillet's pocket when they brought him in last evening."

"They overlooked nothing else," observed Du Chaillet himself. "The captain who searched me—a second Harpagon—even cast wistful eyes on my coat, and regretted it would not fit him."

Jean waved laughing refusal to both invitations.

"No, no; I am too fatigued for choosing between you, *messieurs*. Moreover, I am engaged; I promised Mlle. Rosine a story."

"And *monsieur le marquis*—he is not well enough to-day to leave his cell?" asked a gentle, sad-faced woman, pausing beside him.

He bent over her fingers.

"*Madame*, I thank you for us both; Esmé is perfectly recovered. He sleeps now on condition that I fulfil an errand beside him."

He moved on, exchanging a laughing word or phrase with each one of those who had grown into a friend in this narrowed world, until a cry of baby delight greeted him.

"M'sieu Jean! *Maman*, it is then M'sieu Jean!"

He caught in his arms the tiny, flying figure.

"It is then Mam'zelle Rosine!" he mimicked blithely.

"Yes; and the story, the story, M'sieu Jean?"

"It must be a short one to-day, Rosine."

The child flung back her head to see his bright face.

"Then commence soon, please. M'sieu Jean, why do you laugh with your eyes? No one else here does that."

He looked at the white-haired grandmother who watched them; both father and mother had climbed the steps of the Place Louis Quinze weeks before.

"Because, my Rosine," he answered soberly, "the *bon Dieu* made some of us to laugh as we breathe, so naturally, so indifferently, whether we are glad or sorry within. Now for the story."

"And your audience?" protested the duchess, coming up with her arm around Gabrielle du Marais's waist. "Are we ladies to lose our amusement to-day?"

"*Madame*, I am overwhelmed."

"You should indeed be accustomed to it after all these weeks, M. de Gérin," Mme. de Laurier said, joining the group.

The dozen women of the place had approached with frank interest in this break in the monotonous day. A few of the older men followed them, and settled comfortably around Jean and Rosine.

The custom was one grown familiar to Jean; if there had ever been embarrassment it must have disappeared weeks before. But self-consciousness was most far from his warm consideration for others. He was quite willing to amuse his weary fellow prisoners with the tales and legends first woven for Rosine.

So now he paused for a moment, smilingly surveying his smiling auditors, then plunged into the story.

It was not at all such a tale as prison walls might have been expected to inspire, but one of those wild, fantastic legends with which Gascony abounds. The sweet, free air of the forest swept through the words, the rustle of tiny furry creatures in fallen leaves. The love story, which formed its silver thread, was delicately fresh as the tinkle of a fern-hidden brook.

Breathless, absorbed, caught by the raconteur's charmingly individual grave earnestness, the circle attended. The little Rosine leaned on his knee, her wide blue eyes on his face, one hand unconsciously grasping his sleeve.

When the voice fell into silence there succeeded a brief hush. Not until Jean rose did there come the usual rush of raillery and compliment.

"Do you know, Gérin, you always tell a story well," said the veteran general, St. Laurent, laying his hand on Jean's shoulder; "but to-day you excelled."

"M. de Gérin told that legend as if he knew—" the duchess began, then checked herself hastily.

"Knew, *madame*?" Jean questioned.

"Knew—who listened to you."

"Do I not?"

"No."

He glanced around the dispersing group, and regarded her again inquiringly.

"There are too many people around," she returned. "Go talk to your turnkey, whom I see watching you as usual; when you finish, come back here."

Jean looked at the grated door, then bowed to the duchess and went that way eagerly.

The man with the jailer's badge was apparently inspecting the room in his charge, but his expression grew keenly alert as Jean came up, and he made an involuntary movement of his hand toward his red cap.

"*Monsieur*," he whispered cautiously, "I have not long—I must go at once. But if you and *monseigneur* will be ready to-morrow—"

"So soon, Jacques?"

"Yes, *monsieur*; to-morrow, after those condemned go down to the carts. A coach will be waiting to take you both to Vallon. With *monsieur's* permission, I myself will drive. I long to be there at home with Susette."

"To Vallon," Jean repeated, and tenderness crossed his face as a visible light.

The man slipped noiselessly away. After a while Jean also turned back.

The duchess was gone when he reached the corner; in her place sat a girl who, throwing back her hooded traveling-cloak, lifted wonderful purple-blue eyes to his and stretched out her hands like a lonely child.

"*Mademoiselle*," he cried, "*mademoiselle!*" and sprang to her.

When they had recovered a little Aude drew away her hands.

"It is so good to find one's friends after the long loneliness," she explained tremulously. "When they brought me here last night and I met all these I knew, it almost seemed that I had reached home. *Madame la duchesse* kept me with Gabrielle and her."

"And I did not see you; did not feel you here!"

"She told me you were both in this place, and made me wait while you finished that legend. To see you laughing—some of the horror slipped away."

"But we believed you in England. *Mademoiselle*, why are you here?"

"We went to our château in Normandy first. My mother is in England; I was to follow with my aunt. I have not seen Tante Claire since they arrested us and brought me to Paris."

He laid his hand gently over hers, distressed by her distress.

"*Mademoiselle*, have courage. Most

truly I believe you will not be a prisoner long, perhaps not a day more. It is not to be said aloud, but there is one of our Vallonais who aids us."

Aude regarded him wonderingly, but asked no questions. She had changed much since those last days at the court; the passive dependence that had affected Esmé so strongly was still more marked, the curve of her lip gentler and less wilful. Now, as Jean gazed at her adoringly, a faint rose tinged her cheek again.

"They told me *monsieur le marquis* was here," she said, almost with timidity. "He—does not come to this room?"

"Surely, but to-day he remained in our room—our cell, rather. The fever is long since past; still, he is easily tired."

Some trouble in his voice seized her no less than the indirect statement. Aude's eyes flashed wide.

"He has been ill? Oh, they did not tell me that! *Monsieur*, you are deceiving me—he is not here—"

The bitter cry brought the attention of the whole room to them as she sprang to her feet—an attention immediately and courteously withdrawn at sight of the absorbed couple.

"No, no," Jean denied, his low tones as vehement as hers, "he is here, he is well! *Mademoiselle*, he has been well for days. Do I bear his loss in my face?"

Her eyes met his, and the fear died. Slowly her color returned under his steady regard, a heavy crimson that stained even her white throat.

"You know now, Aude," he said, never more kindly.

"Yes," she answered as quietly. "I know now. I—I ask you to forgive me, *monsieur*."

His dark lashes fell for a mere instant; then the warmly brilliant smile flashed out with his glance.

"Forgive you, *mademoiselle*, because for all these months you have permitted me to wander in my garden of dreams? It is that I thank you for much graciousness. See, if I come out of that garden now and close the gate behind me, still I ask of you our old friendship. You will trust me with that?"

"With more than that," her voice broke on the impulsive reply. "I give

you an affection only less— *Monsieur*, you cannot know how I trust and honor you."

"Then how should I complain, who am rich? And now, *mademoiselle*, I am going to Esmé. In one tiny half-hour I will come back for you, after I tell him who has come to make the Conciergerie outshine Versailles. You permit?"

Aude looked at him, and the tears fell over her face.

There was no one except Jean and Esmé who could cross back and forth from cell to hall at will, although there was no possibility of escape. As Jean moved to the door now, the young Baron de Pontalec called one of the usual jesting comments on this privilege, and several more added their quota of raillery.

Only the duchess, pausing on her way to Aude, noticed that he kept his face turned from them while tossing back the retort which sent a gale of amusement through the room. She scrutinized the girl sharply as she joined her.

"It is the other, then?" she demanded abruptly. "Bah, child, there is no need of shyness. All Paris knew they were mad about you—as was your cousin, Château-Leclair. You have decided for the marquis?"

"*Madame*—"

The duchess shrugged her shoulders.

"Oh, very well. But I should have chosen—differently."

The afternoon shadows slowly deepened through the great room, dark always long before the sun reached the west. The different groups fell quiet; the players left their game to talk in subdued tones with one another; the recently arrived Du Chaillet put away his cherished dice. Some grim apprehension crept out with the creeping dusk; a strange suspense sharpened the voices of the speakers.

But the pretense of unconcern was elaborately maintained; no one alluded to the one thought of all.

By and by Gabrielle du Marais came over to Aude, who was perhaps the only one present ignorant of the prison routine.

"You will find it better after a few days, Aude, *chérie*," she remarked in her indolently sweet tones. "There is almost nothing to fear when one is so re-

cently arrived. I have been here five months, yet my uncle was the king's minister."

"I do not understand," Aude replied, surprised. "I am not afraid, indeed."

Gabrielle contemplated her meditatively.

"I beg your pardon," she said. "You will learn soon enough. Shall I stay?"

"Please," Aude commenced; then her eyes went to the door, and she stopped.

Gabrielle followed the gaze.

"Ah, M. de Gérin comes to you," she murmured amusedly. "Pardon again."

She moved away, nodding to Jean as he passed across the room. Aude rose, trembling with warring agitations, but somehow calmness came to her with Jean's bright glance.

"I have permission from our jailer, and the duchess, to take you to Esmé, *mademoiselle*," he announced. "Not because Esmé is not perfectly able to come here; I only thought—this crowded hall is not pleasant."

Aude put her hand on his arm, guessing nothing of the daily scene he wished to spare her.

The man Jacques was in the outer passage when they crossed, and made an eager move toward Jean, only to fall back hurriedly as several officers wearing the tricolor scarfs appeared at the opposite entrance. Jean hastened his step ever so slightly, then held open a low door for her to pass through.

"*Mademoiselle*," he breathed, saluting her.

And Aude paused to curtsey formally to him before going to her lover.

As Jean went back, Jacques was fumbling with the locks, but there was no opportunity for speech, and the shadowed black eyes saw only what lay behind the door just closed.

Within the long room all pretense of occupation had ceased. Silent, gathered in little knots, the prisoners awaited the nightly event. The duchess came to meet Jean with the freedom of her age and station.

"Let me stay with you," she demanded imperiously. "I am a superstitious old woman, if you will, but I believe ill-fortune passes you by, *monsieur* the laughing. I will shelter under your shield to-night."

"*Madame*, I cannot warrant ill passing me," he returned. "But I will stand between you and it if I can."

The light tone could not quite hide the quiver of recent pain. She looked at him with quick recollection.

"I grow clumsy," she said dryly. "And Aude de Beaumarchais is a pretty fool. Sit down here with me; they are beginning."

One of the officers had stepped forward, a slip of paper in his hand, and glanced over the hall. He was intoxicated, and reeled as he stood, his flushed face full of insolent amusement.

"I have to read the names of those who will be tried at dawn," he declared thickly, running his finger down the lines. "Not many from this room, my children; you are in luck to-night, *hein*? There will be one Guy du Chaillet, previously called *chevalier*. One Citizeness Gabrielle du Marais—pardon, I should have read the lady's name first; ladies always first, *hein*? One De la Vigne; first name unknown. One Esmé de Gérin, formerly marquis. Four, only four, my little ones! *Hein*, there is a citizen afraid."

For Jean's head had fallen in his hands with the last name.

"It is impossible," rang Du Chaillet's horrified voice through the hush. "Impossible, man! I only came here last night—there is some mistake, I tell you—some frightful mistake!"

The officer nodded at him with unsteady gravity.

"I have nothing to do with that, citizen. When the Committee has a dozen a day to despatch, they cannot trouble with mistakes. That is reasonable, *hein*? Good night, my pretty ones."

The spell upon the room broke with the slamming of the door.

"Gabrielle," wailed the duchess, springing toward the frozen girl, who had neither moved nor cried out. "*Petite chérie, petite ange!* Oh, they are devils!"

"It will be over for me to-morrow," Gabrielle replied deliberately. "There is one you have left, *madame*, for whom it will be just commencing. I am not going to faint."

The duchess turned, but Jean had already gone.

Outside in the passage Jacques had waited; the face he lifted was almost as white as the young noble's, and he needed no questions.

"*Monsieur*, I did all in my power. I never knew, I never guessed *monseigneur's* name would come so soon. To-morrow—if they had waited until to-morrow! While the carts are going, the carriage will be here. *Monsieur*, it is so near, so near!"

"But why only him?" Jean demanded passionately. "Why not me also? Why are we separated now?"

The man hesitated.

"*Monsieur*, that is the work of Citizen General Leclair. I dare not say—"

"Leclair. You mean Château-Leclair! Go on, go on."

"They say, *monsieur*, that *monseigneur* is an aristocrat, a master of serfs, while you are—not all his blood—"

Even in that moment the old humiliation burned like a touch of flame. He understood. The Marquis de Gérin would die; they would spare the son of Lélie of the forge.

"Wait," he directed between shut teeth, "let me think," and put his hand across his eyes.

When he looked up the horror had lifted from his face and left in its place a strange light and whiteness.

"Can you have the carriage here so early that it will leave the prison before the carts reach the trial-room?"

"Yes, *monsieur*. I mean to do that for you, but it will be too late for *monseigneur*."

"Will there be any with the carts who know us?"

"No, *monsieur*, except the other prisoners."

"Good. Then after the carts go, take those who will wait for you in our cell. Instead of two men there will be a man and a woman."

They gazed at each other; suddenly Jacques sank to his knee on the prison floor and kissed the other's hand.

The hall, as usual, turned toward the reopening door, growing abruptly silent at sight of Jean on the threshold.

"*Mesdames* and *messieurs*," he said, his voice distinct in all the great room, "you have heard the list. Mlle. de Beaumarchais is betrothed to the Mar-

quis de Gérin; I earnestly ask you to tell her nothing of his danger until—necessary."

Surprise held them still for a moment; before their pity and assent found words, he stepped back and the door closed between. Only Rosine's baby cry filled the pause:

"*Maman*, I want M'sieu Jean! M'sieu Jean who laughs—"

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE TURNED PAGE.

"**A** LIGHT, *très cher!* But you have bewitched our jailer, then?"

"A light, my Esmé, and better than a light. I have good news, deliriously good news. Prepare to be amazed." He turned after fixing the lamp in a bracket on the wall and faced the other, blithely dramatic.

Esmé regarded him tenderly and sorrowfully, a very white and frail Esmé under the lamplight.

"If you laugh, Jean, I shall wish the fever had won before Aude came. Do you think I do not know?"

"The way to avoid laughing when I am glad? Esmé, to-morrow prison ends; Jacques is ready at dawn."

"For all?" he exclaimed, rising.

"Surely, for all. Did you imagine we would leave Aude, perhaps? Only because of the third one we must divide our party; I must go first. I feel of a superb selfishness, to be first, but naturally you and Aude must be together. I have told her to be ready."

Startled, Esmé searched his face keenly.

"There will be no danger to you in that, Jean?"

The gaze was earnest, and Esmé a reader of men, but Jean bore the scrutiny unflinchingly.

"No," he answered, the falsehood his first. And as the clear eyes still lingered he amplified the denial. "How should there be? Does not Jacques love me almost as well as you?"

"More," Esmé admitted, satisfied, and letting the full happiness rise. "To leave this place—it is almost too much! To-morrow—"

He turned to his chair almost giddily,

already unsteadied by the meeting with Aude.

Jean crossed after him with a swift protest.

"Not there, not there. The draft comes there. Remember you must rest. Remember we ride from Paris to-morrow."

The chance phrase woke the memory of both; they paused involuntarily, and the sunny terrace opened before them, bright with emerald and gold, enameled with vivid flowers.

Esmé's hand fell on the other's.

"Vallon," he murmured. "Ah, *très cher*, we are going home!"

Jean bit his lip; for a moment the room wavered around him.

"You must lie down," he directed briskly. "Recollect my successful nursing, if you please."

"Such nursing, Jean. So many wakeful nights, so much unwearied patience. And in the end, I take the woman you love."

Jean smoothed the pillow and arranged the rough blanket with care.

"Do you want to please me to-night, Esmé?"

"To-night and always."

"Then do not let us speak of Aude. Let us think of Vallon—of the pleasant library where we spent so many winter days, of garden and forest and the dear, absurd village. For Aude—it seems to me that I have always known her as your wife, and am content to have it so. Now sleep, if you can. We rise at dawn."

"And you?"

"I am not tired yet. I have a fancy to sit here by you and dream awake for a while."

There was a silence; perhaps Esmé also was dreaming awake as he turned his fair, tranquil face on the pillow, letting weakness sweep him into rest.

The lamp on the wall sputtered monotonously with its cheap oil, casting uncertain gleams across the ugliness of blackened stone and earth.

Far up above a bell struck ten. Esmé started and lifted his eyes to the quiet figure in the broken chair.

"Ten? I have slept, then?"

"Assuredly; for what else did I force you to lie down, my Esmé?"

"You will not rest?"

"Presently; I am not tired. How many wakeful nights have we spent at Versailles, you and I?"

The old cordial smile, the old ripple of laughter in the caressing voice. Smiling also, Esmé drifted down the drowsy current. So in repose, the traces of his recent illness were most distinct—the hollow cheek, the too apparent blue veins of the temples around which clung soft, damp waves of bronze hair.

When the clock struck two he roused again. Jean still sat chin in hand, his great black eyes veiled behind their dark lashes.

"*Très cher*, I wish you would tell me of what you are thinking," said Esmé lovingly, after watching for a moment.

"Of many things. Of the dining-room at Vallon and Lucifer-Cagliostro's green eyes. And a little of the motto over the great doors, '*Plutôt mort que tort*.'

"Rather death than wrong," repeated Esmé dreamily. "Why of that, Jean?"

"Does one trace a thought? But I fancy, somehow, that when those words were written they meant more than just not to do an injury. I fancy they meant that when things threatened to go too wrong, death was the answer we could not find ourselves. All is so beautifully arranged, so beautifully kind. Never mind my metaphysics; perhaps I am drowsy also."

"You take no rest? That was two o'clock; it will soon be morning."

Jean rose and came over impulsively.

"Yes, it will soon be morning. Let me smooth your pillow. Esmé, do you remember that evening when I told you I wished all my happiness was a jewel that I might lay in your hand?"

"Could I forget?"

"I feel to-night as if all my life were melted into such a gift by the Master Alchemist. One does not speak of these things by daylight; will you remember to-morrow that I had no sad thoughts, no regrets, on our last night in prison?"

"Not even of Aude, Jean?"

"Not even of her. Now, sleep, my Esmé."

And because of the lingering weakness, because the bright face he watched was so serene, presently Esmé slept.

An hour later the lamp flared up and went out. After a while a faint gray square grew where the barred window was set.

When a key rattled in the lock, Jean rose and bent over the bed for a long look; then, stooping lower yet, kissed the white forehead. Esmé stirred and smiled in his sleep.

"*Très cher*—" he murmured.

The men in the passage were waiting impatiently when their prisoner came out; one of them was humming the "*Ca Ira*," and beating time with the hilt of his sword. Only Jacques stood with drooping head.

"Good-by, Citizen Jacques," Jean said pleasantly. "All goes well for you?"

"All goes well, except this, *monsieur*," the man answered, his voice choking.

"Then it is very well, *mon ami*."

It was a fragile dawn, a dawn delicately mystic in palest grays and silver-blue, still lacking the golden seal of the sun to stamp it really day. Jean threw back his head for a breath of the cool air, and followed the guard.

"We shall have a delicious sunrise," he commented to his companion, Du Chaillet.

"It is a mistake; I only came last night," answered Du Chaillet dully. "A mistake—"

The streets were animated even so early. Little children played on the sidewalks, soldiers loitered on the corners, and women hastened on household errands. But over the city lay a shadow that the morning only deepened. One might have imagined that the day lingered in the east, unwilling to set her rosy feet on these stained pavements.

Nowhere stayed the shadow so long as in that grim court-room whose steps were splashed with crimson. Already the place was filled with a laughing, pushing crowd; already the judges had disposed of twenty prisoners from La Force, and those from the Conciergerie were eagerly anticipated.

A burst of applause greeted the entrance of the party, a reawakened interest. The judges ceased talking to each other and turned that way.

"The case of the aristocrat, Marie

Gabrielle du Marais," read a man, rising before them.

The officer of the night before, slightly more sober now, waved the young girl forward.

"Go, my beauty," he urged.

"Citizeness Gabrielle Marais," said the presiding judge, referring to his notes. "Accused is a niece of the *ci-devant* Minister Marais, executed last June. Is charged with an attempt to leave the country, carrying a seditious message for the woman Capet, whom she served when called Queen of France."

A murmur ran through the room.

"Have you any defense, citizeness?"

"None, *monsieur*," Gabrielle answered clearly. "Except that I carried for *madame* the queen only a letter to a friend. I never injured your republic."

"Accused acknowledges herself guilty. Stand aside. Next."

A vigorous hand-clapping broke out. A woman shouted, "*Vive la guillotine!*" and several applauded her. Gabrielle curtsied to the mock court and walked unhurriedly back to her place among the group of prisoners.

"Next, one Adrien Esmé de Condé de Gérin, formerly called marquis," read the crier again.

Gabrielle's handkerchief had slipped from her hand, and Jean recovered it for her before going forward.

This time the movement in the crowd was more marked; all eyes followed the prisoner's advance, and the woman who had cheered Gabrielle's sentence whispered an admiring comment.

"Accused is an aristocrat, an attendant of Louis Capet. Is reported to have attacked a worthy citizen—"

A sharp cry had interrupted the indictment as a man rose from a seat just below the third judge.

"There is an error, an error! That is not the Marquis de Gérin."

Stunned silence fell on the room. Jean flung back his head and looked into the horrified eyes of Château-Leclair.

"Ah, you have then lost your mind with your honor, *monsieur*?" he demanded, his composed voice delicately tinged with contempt.

"I never sent either of you here," he flashed. "Least you, who might have killed me once—"

A gasping breath ran through the interested crowd.

"Not the accused?" echoed the judge, amazed. "But who, then? Who, Citizen Leclair?"

"His brother," rang the prompt answer. "Citizen, his brother, whom the Committee reprimed because of his birth. This is Jean de Gérin."

"The Marquis de Gérin," Jean corrected. "Whom you yourself called so before the king and all Paris, Château-Leclair, and who chooses to wear his title to-day."

The meaning broke on Château-Leclair.

"Gérin!" he cried incredulously; "Gérin—"

Jean's cool laugh fell across the unfinished sentence.

"Ah, but this is too much! Citizens, are all your courts so orderly? I congratulate the republic; only the farce becomes fatiguing."

"Silence and order," commanded the judge violently, deeply stung by the shaft. "Citizen Leclair, more respect for the court. Are we to be laughed at by these aristocrats? You, accused, are you or are you not this Marquis de Gérin?"

"Yes," Jean answered deliberately. "Unfortunately, dear *monsieur*."

"You acknowledge yourself guilty of attacking a citizen on the steps of the *palais*, of being a friend of Louis Capet?"

Jean pushed back his dark hair; excitement had given back the rich tints of a beauty always vivid, his gaiety of expression was purposely insolent.

"I had great pleasure in assisting your citizen to expiate his impertinence to the queen, *messieurs*. I hoped the fall would kill him. Really to have this Citizen Leclair suggest that I was of this rabble—"

The fierce outcry of the insulted people, their rush forward, was checked by Château-Leclair's protest.

"It is a lie—he is not the one. Gérin, I cannot—"

The soldiers had ranged themselves between at the judge's furious command; under cover of the tumult, Jean spoke for the last time to his old enemy.

"Keep silence, Château-Leclair, and cancel our debt."

"Is there no one here who knows this man?" shouted the judge as the sullen crowd paused again.

The challenge was direct, and Jean's reckless daring sprang to meet it.

"Yes," he answered. "Ask my fellow prisoners, *monsieur*." And he turned to them for the reply to his trust, not doubting they would understand.

Du Chaillot stood dazed, the young Comte de la Vigne gazed in a sick horror of pity and dismay. Only Gabrielle du Marais swayed forward in response to the passionate appeal of the dark eyes.

"*Mademoiselle*," Jean exclaimed, "you know—"

The room waited, staring, breathless.

"I have pleasure in saluting you, *monsieur le marquis*," she answered in her sweet, slow voice, and curtsied low to him.

The victory was won; bright-eyed, flushed, he set the last stone.

"*Mademoiselle*, I am all gratitude. I ask you, have I the air of a peasant?"

If he had wanted an answer, it came in the cry of the mob, in the one word that set the room shaking with its fierce accord of hate.

"*Aristocrat! Aristocrat! The sentence for the aristocrat!*"

And through it the woman's voice again:

"*Vive la guillotine!*"

"Citizen Leclair," questioned the judge, with a last attempt at order, "you say—"

"I was mistaken," gasped Château-Leclair, and hid his eyes on the desk before him.

"Next, one Raoul de la Vigne," read the crier above the uproar.

When Jean returned to his place, Gabrielle saluted him again.

"M. de Gérin, I have loved you ever since the first night you came to the palace," she said. "Have I earned the right to die beside you?"

He stood still, looking into her proud, steady eyes, and up into his own grew a great wonder—and something greater yet.

"*Mademoiselle*, I have been very dull," he said humbly. "I—wish I had known then. *Mademoiselle*, if you can forgive me, perhaps we can find the answer out there where we are going together."

Only a woman could know how that

"together" held its gemmed cup to the thirst of years. Gabrielle laid her hand on his arm as the guards closed round.

The crowd' was raging, infuriated, pushing and yelling abuse as the procession moved slowly through on its way to the street. On the sidewalk there was a brief delay while the first prisoners were put in the tumbrels, and in this pause a man leaned across the guards to Jean.

"You recollect me, *monsieur*?"

Jean met the translucent green eyes set under the black brows.

(The End.)

"Predict for me once more," he said with perfect steadiness. "The others?" Cagliostro smiled.

"Reassure yourself, *monsieur*; you have bought and paid. I see those you love go peacefully down the golden years."

Jean mechanically lifted his fingers to where the tiny cross lay over his heart, then sent his cloudless smile into Gabrielle's eyes.

"Ah," he said, "it has been worth while, *mademoiselle*."

## AN UNNATURAL FEUD.

BY NORMAN DOUGLAS.

A SHORT STORY.

**E**AR away, among desolate peaks, in that voiceless wilderness of stone and ice where the clouds linger, a horde of rivulets, bursting from patches of eternal snow, joined their waters and sped away. And the stream leaped downward through groves of bearded fir, or glided in a smiling flood over smooth meadows of foxglove and tiger-lily and marigolds, caressing their roots with its eddies.

To the country folk who lived in the valley below, the stream was a living and a spiteful thing. They called it Elfwater. Its waves were dull, bluish, insipid to the taste, and fraught with unhealthy chills from the snows above—none cared to drink of them; and its shores were encrusted with fanciful stone shapes of grass and moss, elves' work, like the ice-crystals on the window-panes in December.

And none cared to build houses near the water, or to own the fields on either side. For, sometimes, in the bluest days of midsummer, the stream suddenly swelled to a furious torrent and overleaped its flowery banks, drowning the lush meadows far and near. "The

elves!" the old folks would then whisper, shaking their heads. They knew its elfish and wayward tricks, and some of them, maybe, still believed in such creatures. And the young men would come out to view the mischief, and gaze into the sunny sky and up at the hills, and talk together and look-wise, secretly wondering.

Only one man could foretell the floods. He had lived on the Elfwater all his life. But he is dead long ago. His cottage is deserted; the roof has fallen in, the wooden beams are decayed, and green moss sprouts between the planks of his floor. He used to look up at the hills and see a small vapory cloud anchored against one snowy peak, and say nothing. Whenever they asked him to explain, he merely smiled, as if the Elfwater kept no secrets from him.

Meanwhile, the fair meadows were flooded, and the crops buried till only a few bright green tips showed above the seething foam. And up in the forest, where all should be still, the shriek of the torrent could be heard from afar. It thundered among the ravines and roared for freedom in its narrow prison, churning the boulders with hideous din and tumbling the tall pines, whose painted